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SUBJECT: OPPOSITION RESPONDS TO SAAKASHVILI, OTHER RECENT
POLITICAL EVENTS

REF: A. TBILISI 2596

[1](#)B. TBILISI 2559

[1](#)C. TBILISI 2574

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: President Saakashvili's October 16 proposal (ref A) for lowering the party list threshold for next year's Parliamentary election was pocketed by the opposition and met with additional demands. The United National Council of opposition parties (ref B) on October 17 released a manifesto outlining the group's policy priorities. Key demands include: holding Parliamentary elections in Spring 2008, creating a new election administration with representatives from political parties, changing the current majoritarian "winner-takes-all" system, and releasing "political prisoners." Without seeking an appointment, the Council's leaders attempted to visit Saakashvili's office to deliver their demands on October 17, but were not given a meeting. In a closed meeting for Western diplomats on October 18, Labor Party Chairman Shalva Natelashvili called for early elections. He asked for Western support for the early elections, for countering the "unconstitutional" government, and for investigating Okruashvili's accusations against Saakashvili. Currently in London, Badri Patarkatsishvili (ref C), published his vision for Georgia's foreign and domestic policy in all major Georgian newspapers on October [1](#)18. The piece noted that Georgia must pursue its own interests above friendships. He said currently Georgia's most important foreign policy interests are the U.S. and Russia. End Summary.

Early Elections and Political Prisoners

[1](#)2. (U) On October 16 President Saakashvili proposed to lower the party list threshold for next year's Parliamentary election to five percent (down from seven percent) and called for "constructive political dialogue" (ref A). The ten opposition parties that constitute the United National Council (ref B) responded on October 17. The opposition pocketed Saakashvili's proposal and repeated their four other demands in a letter to Saakashvili and Speaker of Parliament Nino Burjanadze. In it they requested a meeting on how to pull the country out of its current "political crisis." The letter demanded: 1) hold Parliamentary elections in Spring 2008, 2) create a new election administration to reform the Central Election Commission (CEC) and include representatives from political parties, 3) change the current majoritarian "winner-takes-all" system, 4) release "political prisoners" and "prisoners of conscience." (Note: In addition to these points, the manifesto also calls for: commitment to European and NATO integration, restoration of Georgia's territorial integrity, independence of the judiciary, an end to political

violence, and protection of property rights. End note.)

13. (U) Council leaders downplayed the importance of the election threshold compared to the CEC and majoritarian issues. Davitashvili said the President's proposal was made to "bribe the opposition." He said the President, who also announced a program for one-time payments of electric and gas bills of up to \$60 USD to approximately half the country's population for the coming winter, was seeking a "way out" of the current political situation. MP Pikria Chikhradze of the New Rightists (which is not part of the National Council) agreed that dialogue with the ruling party is impossible if the UNM refuses to compromise on the election code. Even so, the opposition claims that they do not want to miss an opportunity to engage in dialogue with the President. Republican Party leader Tinatin Khidasheli stated that any such meeting should be held publicly and "not behind closed doors." The Council leaders came to the State Chancellery on October 17 to present their demands in person to President Saakashvili. However, they had not requested a meeting in advance and were denied admission. Saakashvili left for Portugal later that night.

14. (U) On October 17, Ruling party MP Giga Bokeria said that the UNM and President are ready for dialogue, but not in the opposition's proposed manner. On October 18, Parliament's Majority Leader, Maia Nadiradze, ruled out any change to the CEC's composition. The same day, ruling party MP Shota Malashkhia appealed to law enforcement to investigate outspoken National Council leader Goga Khaindrava's decision to build "dangerous factories" in the Tskhinvali conflict region while Khaindrava was State Minister of Conflict Resolution.

15. (U) On October 16, four activists from a newly-created opposition youth movement, Georgia Without Violence, were

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arrested for attempting to obstruct Rustaveli Avenue, shortly after the movement's founding. On October 17, the four were sentenced to 20 days detention.

16. (SBU) On October 18, Labor Party Chairman Shalva Natelashvili called in Western diplomats to seek their support for his agenda. Natelashvili asked the diplomats to support the opposition's call for elections in Spring 2008. Taking off from that point, he accused the Saakashvili government of being "unconstitutional," of holding political prisoners and of repressing the media. He linked Okruashvili's accusations to his own suspicions that Saakashvili ordered the death of former Prime Minister Zurab Zhvania. He claimed that Saakashvili had offered him "good business and high posts in government" in return for docility and accused Saakashvili's uncle of being a Russian agent. He predicted that the government will soon declare a state of emergency, arrest him and other opposition leaders, and cancel elections. He then demanded that the Embassies in Tbilisi deny visas to government officials because of their conduct.

Patarkatsishvili Writes Policy Piece

17. (U) On October 17, Badri Patarkatsishvili outlined his vision for Georgia's foreign and domestic policy. He said that he believes Georgia should be a federal state. He said "the central government should be in charge of defense and economy. All the rest should be relegated to the regions." He advocated a two-chamber parliamentary system without a president. In a nod to the Patriarch, he agreed that a constitutional monarchy merits "society's attention." He said that "the United States is strong and friendly, but it is too far, while Russia is aggressive, but it is close to us." Consequently, Patarkatsishvili said that Georgia's foreign policy should be "balanced." He said Georgia's EU

and NATO memberships "are fully in line" with the Georgian people's interests. Opposition members largely approved Patarkatsishvili's program. The UNM responded by focusing on Patarkatsishvili's business interests in Russia, saying it is natural that he would "cede everything" to satisfy these personal interests.

18. (SBU) Comment: Speculation continues to swirl around Patarkatsishvili's true political intentions. The rich Georgian businessman publicly sympathizes with the opposition. His policy statement brings him another step closer to an overt leadership role. End comment.
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